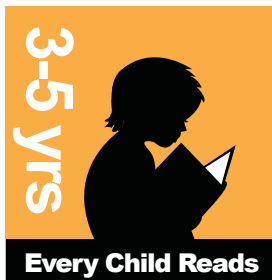


Iowa Department of Education



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**Editor**

Laurabelle Sherman-Proehl  
Administrative Consultant, Iowa Department of Education

**ECR Chairperson**

Natalie Welter  
State Consultant, Early Childhood, Iowa Department of Education

**ECR Project Coordinator**

Penny Milburn  
State Consultant, Early Childhood, Iowa Department of Education

**ECR State Team**

Mary Cameron  
Youth Services Consultant, State Library of Iowa  
Frank Forcucci  
Speech-Language Consultant, Iowa Department of Education  
Dena Goplerud  
Ready to Learn Coordinator, Iowa Public Television  
Tom Rendon  
Head Start State Collaboration Office, Iowa Department of Education  
Deb Samson  
State Consultant, PEC, Iowa Department of Education  
Mary Schertz  
State Consultant, Early Childhood, Iowa Department of Education

**Contributors**

Gloria Frolek Clark  
Occupational Therapist, Heartland (IA) AEA 11  
Wendy Robinson  
Speech-Language Pathologist, Heartland (IA) AEA 11

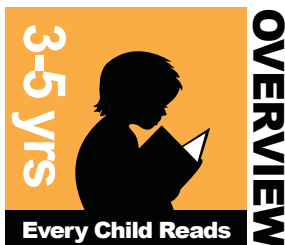
**Production**

Jill J. Jensen  
Instructional Design, The Jensen Group  
James Wray  
Executive Producer, Brackett Media & Event Services

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# Introduction

## *How ECR initiative began*

**EVERY CHILD READS 3-5 (ECR 3-5)** is a statewide initiative led by the Iowa Department of Education. A State Improvement Grant (SIG) from the Office of Special Education Programs, US Department of Education, provided support for the development and implementation of the original initiative from 1999-2004. The funding provided training and incentives for nearly 1,500 early care and education providers to be trained in the ECR strategies.

The ECR initiative grew from a concern over Iowa's declining reading scores. While efforts focused on kindergarten through third grade have stopped the decline in 4th grade reading scores, achievement gaps among some groups still exist. In addition, current data show the need to continue the efforts for children ages three to five. The 2001-2003 Kindergarten Teacher Perception Survey indicated that nearly one-fourth (22-25%) of Iowa children entering kindergarten did not have the knowledge and communication skills expected of children entering school. The ECR 3-5 training teaches early care and education providers strategies they can use with children in the cognitive and communication areas which will provide preschoolers with a strong basis for later reading success.

The material represents the third edition of the training modules. The training has been revised based on trainer experience, analysis of homework, and end-of-the-module evaluations by the Department of Education's ECR work team, as well as trainers across Iowa. In June 2004, a focus group of 10 trainers suggested recommendations for the current revision.

This Concept Paper addresses the staff development model used as the basis for the training curriculum, provides information on training logistics, and reports preliminary results from the data.

## *ECR initiative goal*

The goal of the ECR 3-5 initiative is to expand the capacity of early care and education systems (including early childhood care and education providers) to use language, reading, and writing strategies to enhance the literacy development of children ages 3 to 5 years. Enhancing the literacy development of preschool children increases the chance that these children will be ready for school.



### ***Expected outcomes***

The expected outcomes of the ECR 3-5 training are:

- Increase the percent of children entering kindergarten ready to read.
- Decrease the number of referrals to specialized services in language, reading, and writing by third grade.

The ECR 3-5 training curriculum was designed to teach early care and education providers, including staff in preschools and childcare facilities, as well as individuals who care for children other than their own in home settings. The training provides participants with a repertoire of early literacy strategies. For many providers, the strategies are exciting and new, yet easy to use with children. However, the material is not intended as new learning for all who attend the training. Many providers will discover strategies they already use.

Data from participant profile surveys during past training sessions indicate that providers significantly increased their use of the literacy strategies over time. Providers with less education (high school diploma versus a bachelor's or master's degree) and fewer years of experience had the greatest increase in overall use of the strategies. Providers with more education (bachelor's or master's degree versus high school education) and more years of experience had already been using the strategies but increased the frequency. The ECR 3-5 training reinforced the importance of these strategies and prompted these providers to use the strategies on a daily basis.

ECR 3-5 training outcomes generally include increased and improved interactions related to language, literacy, and writing, which enhances these skill areas in young children.



# Overview

## Module-based Training

**THE TRAINING CONSISTS OF THREE MODULES:** language, reading, and writing. Approximately 17 hours are required to teach all three training modules. The language, reading, and writing modules are each divided into three principles. The principles are research-based key concepts that guide the teaching of young children in the area of literacy. (See Appendix A.) The principles are supported by the standards and benchmarks from Iowa's Early Learning Standards for children ages three to five.

For each principle, specific strategies – also based on research – are identified. These are strategies that early care and education providers use to develop the literacy skills children need for success in school. Research indicates that when these strategies are used regularly before children enter school, they will be better prepared for reading success during their elementary years.

### ***ECR training structure and benefits***

ECR training is designed to incorporate lecture, discussions, examples, and homework assignments that address the development of skills in reading, writing, and language. Handouts support developmentally appropriate activities for children. The information and experience gained through ECR training is critical for providers, as it guides decisions about the types of literacy-rich experiences to plan in the early care and education setting.

ECR follow-up modules were developed to offer further training to providers who completed the basic 17-hour ECR 3-5 training. Follow-up modules include opportunities for additional practice of the strategies taught in the three basic modules, as well as new information. *Selection of Books*, *Creating Literacy Centers*, and *Reading Non-fiction to Children* are examples of follow-up modules.

### ***Parent involvement***

Although the ECR 3-5 training was not specifically developed for parents, many of the strategies can be used by parents in the home. Three follow-up modules are specifically written for parents whose children attend preschools, childcare facilities, and/or homes where providers have been trained in the ECR 3-5 curriculum. The training is provided to these families so children can be exposed to the same literacy development strategies at home and in their early care and education environments.



# Effective Training Components

## *Peer partner professional development model*

**MANY EARLY LITERACY TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES** are available for providers in early care and education settings. Components of the ECR training that set it apart from other training opportunities include:

- Peer Partner Professional Development Model
- Homework, including reflection
- Director/administrator commitment to implementation
- On-going technical assistance
- Job aids

A key component of the ECR training is the Peer Partner Professional Development Model that is incorporated into the training. This model is based on the peer-coaching model developed by Joyce and Showers (1995) and Calhoun and Joyce (1999). Research has identified this model as a highly effective method of supporting the implementation of training strategies into the workplace.

The model requires collaboration between ‘peer partners,’ two or more providers working in the same or similar settings. The partners plan lessons together using the strategies learned during training. When possible, the partners observe each other teaching the lessons they planned together. Afterward, they spend time reflecting on what they learned about these strategies while teaching or observing each other. Lesson plans, observation, and reflection are the homework assignments participants complete with their peer partner as part of the training.

### **Lesson Planning**

The most important part of the peer partner model is lesson planning. During training, participants are given time to plan together. Trainers are urged to give as much time for planning as possible. In some cases, planning will need to continue outside of the training setting.

### **Observation**

The next stage of the model is observation. For the ECR 3-5 training, some of the provider’s planned lessons will be observed by the peer partner. The purpose of the observations causes some confusion. It is important to remember that this is a PEER model, not a SUPERVISORY or EXPERT model. In other words, when the two participants observe each other, the observer is in the role of a learner, not of a supervisor. After observing his/her partner teach the lesson using one of the strategies learned in training, the observer simply says “thanks” and leaves. At no time does the observer comment on what his/her partner did ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ when teaching the strategy.



## Reflection

At the beginning of most training sessions, partners meet to reflect and discuss the use of the strategies in their early care and education environments. During these homework discussions, partners talk about what they learned from using the strategy, how the children responded to the strategy, and how they would use the strategy differently. Again, *at no time do partners critique each other or give each other negative or positive feedback about how they taught the lesson.* The focus is on what each person learned when using the strategy and how children responded to it.

## Implementation of the Peer Partner Model

These guidelines are followed when implementing the peer partner model:

- Providers select a partner rather than having one assigned to them. To make observation as easy as possible, it is recommended that providers choose a partner from the same care/education setting. If this is not possible, a partner from a similar setting would be best.
- Home care providers are unlikely to be able to leave the home to do observations. Therefore, it is recommended they partner with each other during training sessions to develop lesson plans.
- During training sessions, trainers should remind partners to write lesson plans together. Each provider will have a tendency to work on his/her own lesson plan. The old adage, "Two heads are better than one," is an important concept in the planning component of the model.
- It is also recommended that trainers repeatedly remind providers that, when observing each other, they are to be learners and not evaluators. It is difficult to break the 'evaluator' mindset, but it is essential to do so.

Research has demonstrated that the strategies are most likely to be implemented in the workplace if all three components of the peer partner model occur.

Realistically, it is not always possible in early childhood settings, especially home care settings, for partners to observe each other. When it is not feasible for partners to observe each other, trainers are encouraged to use the following guidelines:

- Give providers more time during training to prepare their homework assignments.
- Allow providers more opportunities to role-play their lessons with each other. After each role-play, allow them time to work together to revise their lesson plans based on what they learned during the role-play.
- At the beginning of each training session, allow time for the providers to discuss what they thought went well when they used the strategies and what they would change. After the homework discussion, partners may need time to work together to make changes in their lesson plans.
- Provide opportunities to role-play the modified lesson plans during training sessions.

***Homework: practice and reflection***

Lessons planned by peer partners during the training sessions become homework for the providers. There are ten homework assignments: two in the Language Module, three in the Reading Module, and five in the Writing Module. The assignments give providers the opportunity to practice the strategies with children.

Each homework assignment consists of two parts—the lesson plan, and reflection. A form called a Practice/Reflection Log is provided for each homework assignment. Individuals use this form to plan lessons with their peer partner. Lesson plans are written during training sessions. Time is provided for both partners to write lessons together.

The Reflection section of the assignment is to be completed by each individual after s/he has taught the lesson to the children. There are usually four questions:

1. What were the children's responses to the strategies?
2. What will I do differently the next time I use the strategies?
3. What worked well that I want to remember the next time I use the strategies?
4. What questions would I like answered about the strategies?

Participants refer to their responses to these questions during the homework discussions held at the beginning of each training session. The trainer analyzes responses to the questions, as well as the lesson plans, to determine what strategies need to be re-taught during a future class.

***Director's/ administrator's commitment to support employees in implementation***

Research and literature on organizational change stresses the importance of director/administrator involvement in any change effort. Administrators play a critical role in securing resources and support for providers working to implement the strategies and the change effort. Therefore, the ECR 3-5 initiative encourages trainers to meet with directors/administrators of early care and education settings individually or in small groups before their staff participate in the training. The purpose of the visit is to:

- Ensure that the director/administrator understands the initiative;
- Gather information about the center;
- Gain the director/administrator's commitment to provide time for staff to plan lessons and observe each other teaching the lessons;
- Encourage the director/administrator to be involved with the initiative by attending the training, discussing with staff what they were learning and how they are using the strategies, gaining information to include in parent newsletters, and using the strategies as a means for evaluating staff; and
- Answer questions.

Meeting with the director/administrator is considered a critical element of the ECR 3-5 professional development model. Results of the pilot study indicated that directors/administrators who did not understand and support the initiative and were not committed to implementing the strategies had more participants drop out during the training.

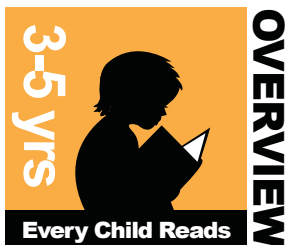


### ***On-going technical assistance for trainers***

The goal of technical assistance is to develop a cadre of early childhood literacy experts throughout the state. ECR 3-5 trainers analyze participant profiles and homework to determine if providers are learning the strategies. Trainers also analyze provider evaluations completed at the end of each module. Based on data from these sources, trainers discuss how to re-teach concepts, modify training, and choose follow-up modules to ensure providers are implementing and using the strategies effectively. In addition, trainers study and discuss the latest research on literacy development in young children and periodically share new handouts and activities they have developed for use in the training.

### ***Job aids***

Adults frequently leave training sessions overloaded with handouts and information. Providing job aids is one way to help participants remember information learned from training. A job aid is a portable, easy-to-use tool (poster, bookmark, stamp, magnet, book cover, etc.) that contains a streamlined version of new information. Participants place the job aids where they can easily see and refer to them as they teach or care for children. Five posters and bookmarks can be prepared for participants as job aids for the three ECR 3-5 modules.



# Effective Training Implementation

## *Time and scheduling*

**ECR 3-5 TRAINING WORKSHOPS** vary from community to community depending on the design of training, intended outcomes, and needs of the participants and trainers.

ECR 3-5 trainers indicate that approximately 17 hours will be required to complete all three modules of the training. In determining the training schedule, trainers need to review each module to identify logical breaks and accommodate appropriate homework assignments. All workshop sessions do not have to be the same length. It is suggested that sessions last no longer than three hours. Trainers report success when training in one-hour blocks of time during provider lunch breaks or in two-hour blocks after the workday.

Participants should be required to complete no more than one or two homework assignments after each session. When establishing schedules for training, allow at least two weeks between sessions for participants to complete the homework assignments.

## *Class size*

Relatively small groups allow the individuals in the class to actively participate in discussions. Classes with an even number of participants allow trainers to quickly divide ECR 3-5 participants into groups and easily accommodate pairs for peer partner activities. When training was offered in Iowa, approximately six to fourteen provider/participants per class created an effective class size for training.

## *Recruitment*

When making decisions about recruiting providers to participate in the training, consider these questions:

- Will the recruiting be done one center at a time?
- Will there be a mix of home providers and childcare-center or preschool-based providers?
- What techniques will be used to recruit?
- Will incentives be offered for participating?

Personal contact with home providers and directors of centers and preschools offers the best approach to identify potential participants. If this is not possible, sending personal letters to these groups is also effective. Trainers may also present information at local meetings of childcare directors or other early childhood professionals. Flyers posted within a community and advertising through Child

Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) newsletters works well when recruiting individuals from a variety of centers/preschools and homes. (See Appendix B.)

A decision to recruit participants from a variety of childcare homes, centers, and preschools provides some challenges. Finding opportunities for peer partners to interact may be difficult, and observation of lessons may not be possible. However, giving providers an opportunity to see and hear what others are doing with children can open up many new possibilities and expand participants' network of resources.

When recruiting, it is important to be straightforward about the required homework and to explain the peer partner model. These training components are new and different for many providers. Because participation takes time outside of the training, explain the requirements before training begins. Emphasize that the homework and peer partnering make the training a success by ensuring implementation of new strategies and behavior changes by adults.

### ***Critical mass***

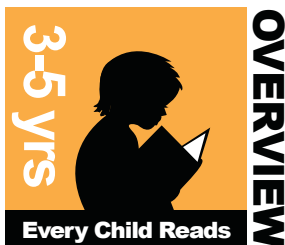
When providers from a childcare center or preschool participate in the training, it is ideal to have a significant group from the same site attend together. Literature on educational change stresses the importance of having a critical mass of staff participate in the change effort at the same time. When 80 percent of staff is trained in new strategies, there is a greater chance the strategies will be implemented in the early care and education setting (Joyce & Showers, 1995).

Recruiting a center or preschool to participate as a group also assists in implementing the peer partner model. When at least two people from each setting attend the same training session, the peer partner model is more easily implemented.

### ***Incentives for participation in training***

Many childcare providers have restrictions on their time and financial resources. Offering incentives for participation in and completion of the ECR 3-5 training has proven to be an effective recruiting tool. Incentives may include a stipend (matching providers' hourly wage when possible) if the training is offered beyond the provider's workday. Books or other resources and materials to use with children may also be used as incentives. One option is to offer books to childcare centers or preschools if a given percent of staff completes the training.

Funding for incentives may be found through foundations, local service groups, local community partnerships, or other local agencies. Public libraries may also provide resources for locating free books for children and families or for purchasing books at a low cost.



# Training Curriculum Evaluation

## ***Participant profile***

**DURING THE GRANT PERIOD**, nearly fifteen hundred (1,497) early care and education providers participated in 15 hours of training. Several tools were used to evaluate the training:

- Participant Profile
- Homework Analysis
- Children's Personal Narrative Skills
- Speech-Language Oral Narrative Study

At the beginning and end of each module, providers completed the Participant Profile (Handout Masters, Principle 1). Response data showed that providers significantly increased their use of the literacy strategies over time. Providers with less education (high school diploma versus a bachelor's or master's degree) and fewer years of experience had the most increase in overall use of the strategies. Providers with more education (bachelor's or master's degree versus high school education) and more years of experience had already been using the strategies but increased the frequency. These providers began using the strategies on a daily basis.

## ***Homework analysis***

Participants completed homework for all but one principle. Homework was analyzed using the Homework Analysis Worksheets. (See Supplemental Trainer Materials.) End-of-session evaluation forms were also analyzed. Trainers used this information to determine participants' understanding of strategies trained.

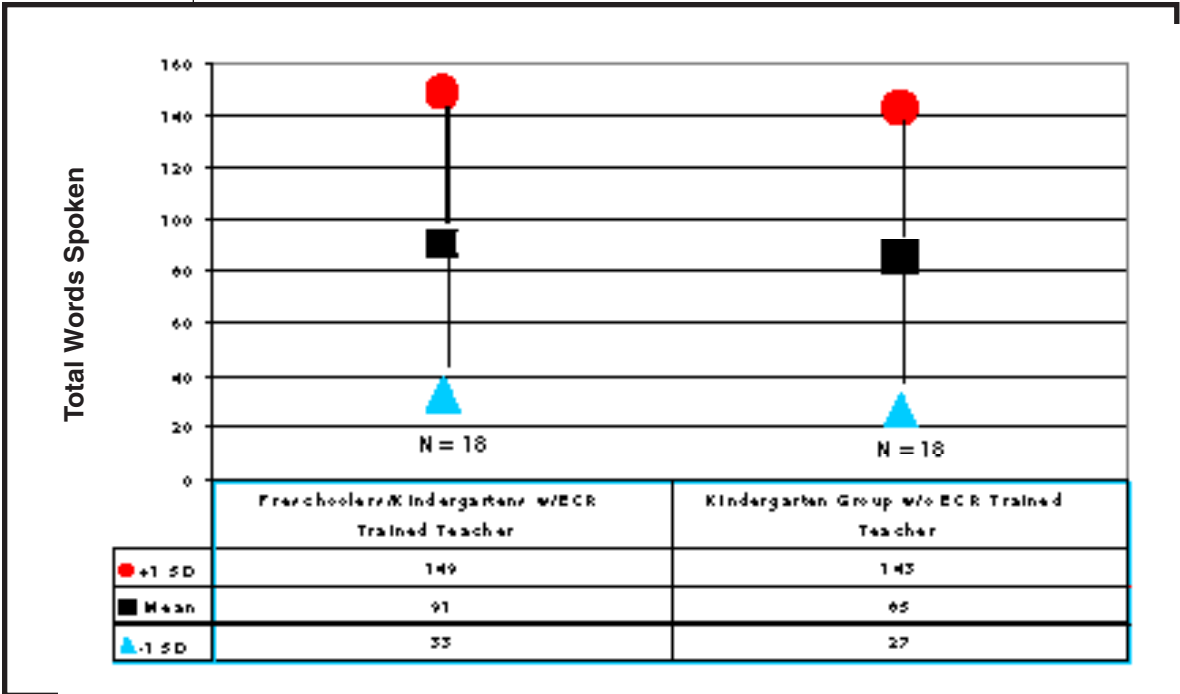
## ***Children's personal storytelling (narrative) skills***

The purpose of the personal storytelling study was to determine if a difference occurred for kindergartners' personal storytelling (narrative) skills when their early care and education teacher received ECR 3-5 literacy training compared to matched kindergartners whose early care and education teacher did not receive literacy training.

Subjects of the study were 36 kindergarten children who had attended early care and/or education settings before kindergarten. Half of the children (18) attended settings where the providers had received the *ECR 3-5 Literacy Training*.

Each child in the study was asked to tell three different personal narratives or stories. First, the adult told a scripted personal story, *Going to McDonald's*, and the child was then asked to share his or her own personal story. The same procedures were replicated for the second story (*Going to a Birthday Party*) and the third story (*Going to the Doctor's Office*).

Results of the data indicated that the ECR 3-5 kindergarten group had an average of 91 Total Words Spoken (TWS), and the matched peer group had an average of 85 TWS. The following table shows the mean and standard deviation of Total Words Spoken.



**TABLE 1**

As indicated in Table 1, results of the study showed that children who attended early care and education settings where the teacher received the Every Child Reads 3-5 literacy training produced more words in their narrative (TWS: 91) than those children whose teacher did not receive the literacy training (TWS: 85). This may suggest that the training gives early care and education providers with strategies that will lead to supporting academic success for children.

**Additional information**

To receive additional information about the ECR 3-5 training, contact the Iowa Department of Education at (515) 281-3021.

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## Training Overview: Modules, Principles, Strategies

### Language Module

#### Principle 1

Children need to have many experiences to develop background knowledge and language skills

#### Strategy

Provide a variety of meaningful experiences using daily routines or planned experiences

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#### Principle 2

Children need frequent opportunities to talk about their experiences and ideas using words, phrases, and sentences

#### Strategy

Talk with children before, during, or after an experience or activity

- Use sentences to match children's understanding
- Provide children with time to talk
- Engage children in conversation
  - 1) Make comments or statements
  - 2) Ask questions
  - 3) Respond and add new information to children's comments and questions

---

#### Principle 3

Children need to learn and use new vocabulary or words continuously

#### Strategy

Indirectly teach vocabulary by introducing or reinforcing a variety of words or concepts to expand children's conversation

## Reading Module

### Principle 1

Children need to interact with books

### Strategies

Select appropriate books

- Match children's skills and interests
- Non-fiction and fiction
- Predictable books

BEFORE reading

- Read title, author, and illustrator's names
- Predict what will happen in the story
- Preview the story
- Directly teach new vocabulary words
- Connect the story to real-life experiences
- Give children a reason to listen

DURING reading

- Point to pictures that are meaningful to story
- Make predictions
- Ask questions
- Answer children's questions

AFTER reading

- Ask guided story questions
- Use sentence completion
- Relate to children's experiences

### Principle 2

Children need to practice retelling stories from books

### Strategies

Model retelling stories from books

Provide story retelling opportunities

- Use prompts, props, or cues with young children
- Allow children to retell stories on their own, once in a while

### Principle 3

Children must be aware that spoken language is made up of words, parts of words, and sounds in words

### Strategies

Awareness of words (3 years of age)

- Rhyming
- Sentence completion

Awareness of parts of words (4 years of age)

- Segmenting words: taking words apart
- Blending words: putting words together

Awareness of sounds in words (5 years of age)

- Focus on same/different sounds
- Alliteration

## Writing Module

### Principle 1

Children need to develop an awareness of print

### Strategies

Structure the environment to encourage children's awareness of print

- Use labels, lists, signs, and charts

Point to and read meaningful print aloud to children

- Connect words to meaningful experiences, such as daily routines or special events in or outside of child setting

### Principle 2

Children need to develop fine motor hand skills for writing

### Strategies

Provide a variety of small manipulative objects and activities for children to develop fine motor skills

- In-hand manipulation: primary focus of small motor skill development

Model and demonstrate fine motor hand skills

- Sensorimotor: developing various grasps
- Scribbling: beginning skill that leads to writing
- Writing first letters: experimenting with lines and shapes

### Principle 3

Children need to engage in meaningful writing experiences

### Strategies

Provide materials for writing

- Writing area: wealth of writing materials, writing accessories

Structure play areas and activities to encourage writing

- Include writing (literacy) props in play areas

Model and explain writing tasks, interact with children, make suggestions, offer encouragement!

- Demonstrate writing has a real purpose in daily activities
- Model writing in daily events and routines
- Call attention to what has been written



## Appendix B

### Information to Include in Letters to Center Directors, Administrators, and Staff

#### Program Benefits

- Children will be better prepared to learn to read in kindergarten.
- Staff will be trained in the latest literacy strategies to improve children's readiness to read.
- Centers will have staff trained in research-based strategies for increasing literacy skills of young children, which is a positive marketing strategy for the center.
- Centers will receive books.

#### Participant Expectations

- Attend approximately 17 hours of training, conveniently scheduled for center staff.
- Plan and practice literacy strategies taught during the training sessions with a peer partner from the center.
- Meet one time per month after the training for follow-up sessions to problem-solve, answer questions, and receive new information/strategies.
- Distribute materials for families that reinforce strategies being used in the center.
- Attend 6 hours of follow-up training over a six-month period, beginning at least one month after completing the modules.